



## **Maroon Bells – Snowmass Wilderness Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan White River National Forest**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

#### **Q. Why do we need a Visitor Use Management Plan?**

**A.** A plan will provide a framework to adaptively manage for increasing natural resource degradation within the Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness. The proposed plan will enable managers to be flexible and assess specific areas within the Wilderness and address resource concerns with an appropriate management tool. The plan seeks to balance the preservation of natural conditions by addressing biophysical impacts resulting from overnight use, while continuing to provide opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities.

#### **Q. What kind of degradation is happening in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?**

**A.** Increasing overnight visitor use within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness has been documented as a management concern since 1986. Within certain locations (*Conundrum Hot Springs, Crater Lake and the 4 Pass Loop*) and high use travel corridors, use has increased up to 285% from 2006 to 2015. Degradation to the Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness physical resource includes disturbance of wildlife, habituated wildlife to human trash and campsites, illegal tree cutting coupled with fire scars, trash, human waste, campsite hardening and proliferation. Additionally there are social impacts occurring on the landscape to opportunities for solitude, lack of Wilderness and camping ethics, crowding, noise and overcrowding in parking areas and increased need for emergency closures.

#### **Q. How long has the Forest Service been monitoring the Maroon Bells – Snowmass Wilderness?**

**A.** Increasing visitor use within the Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness has been documented as a management concern since the 1986 White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) and was addressed in the 2002 LRMP revision. The Forest has been monitoring and collecting wilderness data for decades. Wilderness data has been obtained through campsite inventories, required overnight registrations, and through wilderness ranger patrol logs.

#### **Q. Does this Plan apply to day use of the Maroon Bells Snowmass Wilderness?**

**A.** No. This proposed plan will only address overnight use of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness.

#### **Q. Does this Plan apply to the whole wilderness area or just specific areas?**

**A.** This plan applies to the entire Maroon Bells –Snowmass Wilderness. However, the Wilderness has been divided into overnight zones, based on management area prescriptions and indicators established in the Forest Land Management and Resource Plans.

#### **Q. How did the Forest Service determine the overnight zones?**

**A.** As part of the planning process a study was completed that defined the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness physical capacity for overnight visitors. The overnight visitor capacity study took

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into consideration visitor use patterns and trends related to overnight use and the entire Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness was zoned so as to better define each zone's capacity for overnight use. The plan incorporated current LRMP desired conditions, standards and guidelines into measurable indicators and thresholds for overnight camping zones.

Current Land and Resource Management Plan wilderness direction is based on group encounters (referred to as "parties encountered"). Therefore, the addition of a new indicator to monitor overnight "Groups At One Time" (GAOT) per camping zone was needed in order to specifically address and manage the biophysical impacts in the zones.

**Q. How did the Forest Service determine thresholds for the camping zones?**

**A.** The GAOT indicator and associated thresholds for overnight use in each management area is supported by years of Aspen-Sopris District monitoring and campsite inventory data.

The GAOT is the primary indicator, the first and most sensitive trigger for additional, potential management tools like a permit system. Once the threshold is exceeded within a zone, that zone would require an appropriate management action. The plan utilizes an adaptive management strategy, so only those zones that exceed thresholds would have a management actions triggered and implemented.

**Q. What is adaptive management and how is it being used in the context of this proposal?**

**A.** Adaptive management focuses on learning and adapting, through partnerships of managers, and other stakeholders who learn together how to create and maintain sustainable resource systems. In the context of this proposed plan, an adaptive strategy defines desired conditions with indicators and threshold standards. When thresholds are exceeded for an indicator, management actions are triggered to achieve compliance. These triggered actions are phased in so that the least intensive intervention that achieves the desired conditions is utilized (minimum tool). The adaptive management strategy will allow for long-term monitoring of physical displacement and implement a permit system if the capacity is exceeded for any zone in Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness.

**Q. What is the ultimate goal of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan?**

**A.** The proposed plan seeks to provide long-term direction and flexibility in management focused on reducing biophysical impacts from overnight visitor use in accordance with the Wilderness Act and the White River and Gunnison National Forests, Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP's) thereby; preserving wilderness character of the Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness by sustaining its natural and undeveloped qualities.

**Q. Will this Plan implement an overnight permit system? Will there be a fee?**

**A.** A permit system is a potential management tool that may be selected for a specific zone if sustainable use levels are exceeded in that zone. A separate secondary public process will be available prior to implementation of a fee for a "special recreation permit" in accordance with Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) if authorized through this decision.



**Q. How will the Forest Service enforce this plan?**

**A.** If the proposed plan is adopted, the Forest Service will work with Forest Service Law Enforcement, Forest Service Protection Officers, wilderness rangers, volunteers and partner organizations to implement the plan.

**Q. What benefit would this plan provide to the recreational experience?**

**A.** The proposed plan would provide managers long-term tools to directly address the resource degradation occurring on the landscape including; human waste, illegal fires, wildlife habituation and illegal camping. Having the ability to address these bio-physical concerns, would improve both the biophysical environment (natural and undeveloped) and social qualities within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, thereby enhancing opportunities for wilderness experiences for future visitors.

**Q. Where is the process/next steps and how can I get involved?**

**A.** The Legal Notice for the proposed plan will be published on Nov. 3 which will begin the scoping period for the proposed Maroon Bells – Snowmass Wilderness Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan. The scoping period will be 30 days from the publication date in the official paper of record which is the Glenwood Springs Post Independent. During the scoping process, the Forest Service formally asks the public to look at the proposed Plan and provide feedback, possible solutions and identify information that was not considered. These comments will be helpful to develop the issues addressed in the environmental assessment. It is most helpful to comment during the legal scoping period and keep comments specific to the proposed plan. There will be another opportunity to comment on the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) which will come out sometime in the spring of 2016. Those wishing to gain standing for objection must comment within one of the legal comment periods.

